



Building the Momentum:

Placer NEOP Coalesces Partners to Increase EBT Access at Farmers' Markets

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Intervention Summary

In 2013, Placer NEOP staff identified a need and a demand to initiate and sustain EBT services at Placer farmers' markets so that SNAP-eligible families may use their EBT benefits at the markets. Placer NEOP staff then built relationships with key stakeholders over a period of two years. They also conducted a needs assessment to determine barriers and needs for implementation. Negative perceptions about implementation were identified, as well as a need for financial resources to fund implementation. In 2015, Placer NEOP coalesced partners and market managers to secure a multi-year USDA grant to support EBT implementation at Placer County markets turning an important community need into reality.

Description of Barriers Encountered and Identified or Proposed Solutions

Placer County is one of the most agriculturally rich counties in California and boasts several farmers' markets. However, in 2013, Placer NEOP staff identified that no farmers' markets in Placer County accepted EBT. This meant that the most food insecure, low-income families did not have access to farm-fresh food growing right in their communities.

In order to address this barrier, Placer NEOP staff knew it would be important to build relationships with key stakeholders within the County who could support EBT implementation. Over the next two years, NEOP staff built relationships with stakeholders by recruiting key individuals to participate in CNAP meetings and by supporting other food security initiatives within the community. Over time, staff built the necessary trust and support with key partners. CNAP membership grew from five member organizations to over 30 organizations. Placer NEOP staff became well-known and respected with the community and among partners.

At the same time, needs assessments were also conducted with CNAP partners. CNAP partners expressed a high desire to implement EBT at farmers' markets to serve the County's low-income families, especially those who live in geographically remote areas. They understood the importance and believed that EBT implementation would increase food access and security. They also seemed to have a high level of readiness, as they had been discussing EBT implementation, had a plan for implementation and had included it within the CNAP plan.

Needs assessments were also conducted with market staff. They believed that they lacked staffing, administrative support and financial resources to sustainably and effectively implement EBT at the markets. Market staff were concerned about additional workload for market staff, a loss in profits due to environmental effects of the ongoing drought and doubted that SNAP participants that would actually use their benefits and increase overall market profits. As a result, market staff felt reluctant to implement and sustain an EBT system at their farmers' markets. According to the market staff, it seemed that the barriers and needs exceeded the readiness for implementing EBT. With this feedback, it became evident that additional funding resources would be critical to implementing EBT at farmers' markets to address the barriers and market operators' needs. This barrier, though, seemed insurmountable as no one partner had enough resources to support the needs identified by market operators and managers.

Then the USDA released an announcement for funding EBT at farmers' markets during the summer of 2015. Placer NEOP staff immediately convened its partners from Nevada, Sacramento, and Yolo County to discuss and apply for the funding. NEOP Staff were aware that this grant opportunity could provide the critical funds needed to address market managers' concerns and successfully launch EBT acceptance within Placer County. Placer NEOP staff simultaneously also gained much needed buy-in from Placer County market managers and operators. This proved to be quite challenging given the lack of readiness and identified barriers. Some market staff initially reiterated their resistance, as they would not return phone calls or emails and voiced opposition to participating. However, Placer NEOP staff was able to educate market managers on the potential benefits, ease of use, and impact for the community. NEOP staff also devised a plan to implement EBT that would meet the needs of the market staff. The market staff eventually recognized the potential benefits and provided full support for the grant application.

The USDA grant application submitted at the end of June 2015 and by the end of September 2015, Placer NEOP staff and partners were notified that they were awarded the grant.

Overall, it took years of relationship building and countless hours of formative work to prepare Placer County for this monumental systems change resulting in an outcome well worth the effort. Thanks to Placer NEOP staff and its partners, low-income families will soon be able to use their EBT benefits at farmers' markets within Placer County.

Future Directions/Sustainable Success

During the next one to two years, Placer NEOP staff and partners will provide market operators with the administrative support and technical assistance needed to set-up and implement EBT at their markets. Placer NEOP also plans to work with its targeted neighborhoods, specifically through community liaisons, Promotoras (community health workers), and county CalFresh (California's Food Stamp Program) offices in Placer County to promote the market and the benefits of shopping at the market. Over time, it is anticipated that more than 18,000 people in Placer County who use CalFresh may benefit directly from Placer NEOP's successful efforts to coalesce partners around EBT implementation at farmers' markets.

Contact information about this Narrative

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